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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001749

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STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: DEPUTIES SIGNATURE APPEALS PROCESS BEGINS

REF: CARACAS 1730

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor,  
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) The signature appeals process for the recall of 14 National Assembly deputies (13 from the opposition and one from the GOV coalition) takes place May 20-24, with appeals centers operating May 21-23. The CNE decided May 19 to drop two opposition and one pro-GOV deputy from the appeals process ("reparos") when it was determined that there were not enough potential appeals to activate the recall referendum against them. The National Electoral Council (CNE) set up on May 20 the 550 appeals centers in 11 states to operate for the following three days. One AD deputy subject to recall reported low turnout in his district and complained that CNE officials had been slow and uncooperative in organizing the event. Chavez supporters are confident they will collect enough signatures to force a recall vote against six to ten opposition deputies. Some 35 international observers have been deployed to the corresponding electoral districts. End Summary.

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Deputies Signature Appeals Begin  
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2. (U) The National Electoral Council (CNE) set up 550 appeals centers in 11 states on May 20 to register signature appeals in the recall process against 14 National Assembly deputies. CNE Director Jorge Rodriguez told reporters May 21 that 100 percent of the centers had opened with minimal difficulties. The centers are open May 21-23 for signers of the November 2003 petition to appeal either their inclusion or exclusion from those petitions. During the signature drives in November 2003, Chavez supporters collected signatures against 32 opposition deputies; the opposition collected against 32 pro-GOV deputies (ref a).

3. (U) CNE Director Jorge Rodriguez announced May 19 that three deputies -- one from President Hugo Chavez's Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) and two from the opposition -- were dropped from the process because even with 100 percent of the appealable signatures restored the threshold of 20 percent of registered voters in the electoral district would not be reached. Rodriguez also indicated that, although the rules stipulate the CNE must announce the rules within four days (May 28), the CNE will likely hold off on the announcement until the results of the May 27-31 appeals for the recall process against President Hugo Chavez are known.

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Revocable Deputy Complains of CNE Foot-dragging  
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4. (C) Accion Democratica (AD) Deputy Alfonso Marquina, subject to recall in Sucre, told Poloff May 20 that military officials in charge of delivering the appeals materials (as part of Plan Republica) were several hours late in arriving. Marquina also complained that, in preparation for the appeals, had delayed the training course for appeals agents three times, causing his volunteers to miss several days of work. Marquina said the Coordinadora Democratica (CD) had "orphaned" the deputies subject to recall to focus on the presidential appeals. Marquina said the AD party in Sucre was giving him its full support to field CNE agents and witnesses for the 29 centers (43 tables) operating in his state. Marquina reported on May 21 that several centers had opened late and that attendance was low. He noted that at a center with more than 3,000 potential appeals, only 50 appeals had been collected in the first three hours of operation.

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Comando Ayacucho Sees Success  
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15. (C) Jose Albornoz (Patria Para Todos), member of the pro-Chavez campaign committee Comando Ayacucho, told poloff May 21 they are sure they will activate the referendum against at least six opposition deputies. Albornoz said that with excellent turnout the Chavistas may get enough appeals to force the recall against 10 deputies. Albornoz said that if these 10 deputies are ultimately recalled, it would have no effect on the National Assembly, where the GOV already has a simple majority.

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International Observers Deployed  
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16. (U) The OAS has 15 observers and the Carter Center (TCC) 20 observers in 11 states to cover the appeals. According to the rules, international observers will receive a copy of the daily tally sheets ("actas") at the close of each day. The observers will not be doing a "quick count" for the deputies appeals.

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Comment  
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17. (C) Chavez supporters initiated the deputies recall process as a counterweight to the presidential referendum. It has not generated much excitement among Chavistas, and hardly any among the opposition. It is important procedurally, however, as the CNE will no doubt fold the appeals verification into that of the presidential appeals the following week. The CD is watching closely, of course, as CNE practices during this appeals period will foreshadow that of the presidential appeals.  
SHAPIRO

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